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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: APRIL FOOLS - NLC SUSPENDS STRIKE OF CIVIL SERVICE

Ref: Lagos 673

1. SUMMARY: Joseph Akinlaja, General Secretary of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, informed Laboff that the GON reached an agreement with the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) at approximately 0100 hours on April 1, 2003, hours before a nationwide civil service strike was scheduled to begin. A few pockets of workers did not get word of the agreement and carried out the strike this morning; word of the agreement has since spread to most areas. Despite initial confusion, there have been no serious violence or demonstrations. Akinlaja said he is certain that NLC leaders will suspend the strike when they meet today in Abuja. NLC President Adams Oshiomhole will hold a press conference to brief journalists on the NLC's position after union leaders review the agreement. Details of the agreement will be available by April 2, 2003. END SUMMARY.

2. Despite the NLC's late night agreement, the national secretariat failed to send a clear signal in time to all state chapters to call off the strike. While most civil servants in Lagos and Abuja were informed this morning that the agreement was reached, small pockets of civil servants at the state level did not receive the news and did not report for work. In Jos and Sokoto, where local radio stations announced that the strike had been called off, most workers reported for duty.

3. Oshiomhole's statement on the Hausa Service of the BBC this morning did not clarify matters in the North; he told listeners of the NLC's discussions with the GON but did not instruct workers to call off the strike. In Abuja, most of the streets housing government offices were empty this morning. At the Federal Secretariat and Supreme Court, some workers attempted

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to force their colleagues to comply with the strike order. Some of the workers who had reported to work capitalized on the confusion as an excuse to return home. Several senior management officers remained at work to comply with the GON's instruction that workers from levels 7-17 are exempt from the strike. At the Abuja airport, most of the offices were initially closed in the morning, but Aviation Minister Kema Chikwe reportedly instructed senior management to reopen the affected offices. In Kano, the fuel scarcity coupled with the strike caused most workers to stay home. Although some workers later reported, the strike had already paralyzed activities in Kano City. In Kaduna the strike was partially observed. In the early morning, labor leaders locked out workers who reported for duty; by late morning, leaders allowed some workers to occupy their offices.

4. The Ambassador and Laboff are scheduled to meet with Oshiomhole on Thursday, April 3 to discuss the suspended strike, NLC efforts to resolve the 12.5 percent wage increase dispute, and other labor issues leading up to the elections. COMMENT: We expect that tomorrow will return to normal, unless the purported agreement implodes as the sides wrangle over details. END COMMENT.

HINSON-JONES